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ABSTRACT

In the coming years, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) will need to confront a number of issues relating to its structure and mission and the larger context in which the association works. In terms of organizational structure, it is useful to consider the nature of the democratic process and the role that reflection, representation, and responsibility play in that process. Other principles are involved in organizational structures that reflect the democratic process. These principles include: (1) the choice of error, which is that any decision has its own errors embedded within it; (2) the fundamental attribution error, which is the tendency to explain other people's behavior in terms of their dispositions or traits; and (3) the tendency to romanticize the knowledge and contributions of "the grassroots" and neglect the valuable insights of upper-level agency personnel and minority-position visionaries who may not work directly with children. The mission of the NAEYC remains to upgrade the quality of programs and provisions for young children and to improve public understanding of what is required for this upgrading. In the future, this mission might include efforts to keep the focus on developmentally appropriate practices, influence public policies away from the language of "readiness" toward the more encompassing goal of "quality of life," continue work on cultural diversity, and develop standards for early childhood professional development and practice. The public and private contexts in which the NAEYC functions are pervaded by various notions of accountability, confusion about what accountability means, and opinionmakers' tendency to blame schools for the nation's ills. (AC)

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Visions of the Future of NAEYC & Early Childhood Education*

Lilian G. Katz, Ph. D.

One of the problems of attempting to envision the future is that we can only address it in terms of what we now know. By definition, we can't make predictions on the basis of what will only be known later, because we simply cannot know what that is!

For example, if you were giving advice to your child in 1843 on how to secure his or her future prosperity, you might have said something like "The thing to do is find an efficient way to produce more and cheaper quill pens; breed a bigger bird that gives more feathers!" Because the fountain pen wasn't invented until 1844. In 1887 you might have advised making cheaper fountain pens because the ball point wasn't invented until 1888. In 1825, you would have described the American dream as each household having two horses and carriages in its stable because the internal combustion

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engine wasn't invented until 1826, and first motor driven vehicle was not built until 1860.

Thus predicting and envisioning futures is a risky matter. But, while the means, methods, and mechanics of writing or traveling could not have been known in advance, the problems these inventions addressed were known: how best to write, and how best to get around; and they are still with us today. So the task is: what are the main problems confronting us today? The challenge is to identify and clarify the issues to be addressed, and to hope that greater clarification and clearer identification will stimulate fresh and effective invention.

I shall attempt to do this on the basis of my own hunches and perceptions, based largely on my long experience of participation in this great organization and profession, rather than as its spokesperson. And even though it goes against my natural proclivities, I shall do my best to be provocative. Remember that we don't have to agree with each other! But we do have to understand each other; and that much is hard enough!

I have divided my comments under three broad headings: structural issues, NAEYC's mission, and the larger context in which we work.

Structural Issues

As you know, the governing board of NAEYC made a commitment to examining the organizational structure of the association,

with a view to ensuring that the current structure is suited to carrying out its mission.

There are many possible points of entry into discussion of how a professional association should be organized. I would like to suggest that a useful one is to examine the issues in terms of the nature of democratic processes. Nearly forty years ago, when I was preparing to become a citizen of the United States, I learned some fundamental principles of democratic governance. Let us call these the "Three R's" of government by consent of the governed, as follows:

> Reflection. This "R" refers to the fact that those who govern must **reflect** the views, desires, preferences and sentiments of those who elected them in the processes of decision-making. They don't necessarily have to agree with those views, desires and preferences. But the governors introduce these reflections into all deliberations concerning decisions that will impinge upon the governed. This happens during our board meetings when we say things like "The teachers I work with think X," or "want more Y," "The people who voted for me would prefer A not B." or "The parents or students I know prefer Z." These reflections are shared in discussion independent of whether they are correct, or right, or in other ways well-founded. This process depends greatly on the flow of information among and between us all, and makes it important that board members are in touch with members and their affiliate groups. As we consider the structure of the organization, we must worry about improving the flow of information to and from the decision-makers.
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> Representation. This "R" refers to the fact that those who govern and make decisions must **represent** those who elected them. The governors do not necessarily agree with the preferences and views they represent. But they must urge their fellow board members to consider those they stand in for, often competing with others similarly represented by their colleagues on the board; they must speak

for their constituents, and champion their preferences and needs in relevant deliberations. While we do not now have geographic representation of our members, we must be concerned about the diverse groups and types of work, professional positions, and responsibilities of our large membership. This process depends greatly on the flow of information among us all, and makes it important for board members to be in touch with members and their affiliate groups. As we consider the structure of the organization, we must worry about improving the flow of information to and from the decision-makers.

Responsibility. Those who govern must make decisions that those they reflect and represent cannot make because they do not have the larger picture of all the competing pressures, preferences, wishes and needs of the whole membership. This "R" deals with the larger picture of our common good, and this picture is often not available to all members. This "R" deal with the long term versus the short term consequences of decisions to the welfare of the organization and the profession which it serves.

This "R" comes up very often in our deliberations, even though we may not recognize it as such. The board of governors has a legal **responsibility** to preserve the integrity and stability of the organization. This causes governing bodies to be conservative as they focus on conserving the values, integrity, and traditions of the organization. Remember that the governors hold all the actual, material and substantive assets of the organization in trust, and are legally bound to protect, preserve, and promote them. If they are careless or negligent in this matter, they can be sued for breach of trust.

Members at large often complain that once a person becomes a member of the board she or he becomes co-opted by those "in power." In a sense, this attribution is valid: once on the governing board, a person has access to the multiple reflected, and represented views, desires and preferences of all members; the breadth and depth of the information increases with participation on the board. It is in the nature of things that governors temper their "grass roots" sentiments with new information, as well as with their new understanding of the legal trust they accept as part of board membership.

These three "R's" are frequently, if not always, in conflict. Of course there is an easy way out of these conflicts. Perhaps some organizations opt for it. That is to "stack" the board with like-minded folks. We took a decision several years ago (1969?) not to do that, but to constitute the governing board as diversely and broadly as possible. Thus conflicts are not only inevitable, but desirable; they are to be prized! But there are at least three principles relevant to the problems encountered in these processes.

First, is the principle of "choice of error;" namely, whatever decisions we take, each of them has embedded within it, its own errors. If we decide to maximize the diversity of the board, the "error" is that we will have conflicts. Our deliberations will be tiresome, trying, tendentious, and often, tense. But we will have the widest possible views, preferences and opinions reflected and represented in our deliberations. If, on the other hand, we opted for a stacked board, like an "old girls' club," we would have congenial and convivial meetings. But the potential "error" would be that the organization would stagnate as the "old girls" retired. Most likely the organization would sooner or later atrophy and perhaps wither away altogether. Another potential "error" is that the stacked board would fail its mission as leaders and advocates for our very diverse profession and those it is committed to serve. Neither the profession or democracy would be served. All of this is to say that we must have dissension,

disagreement, minority opinions, and passionate radicals who minimize the risks of the conservatism inherent in our roles.*

Second, it is helpful to recall the well-studied phenomenon known as the "fundamental attribution error" (ref.). Namely, that when we try to explain others' behavior to ourselves, we attribute it to their ***dispositions*** or traits. Thus we attribute others' behavior to traits or dispositions such as defensiveness, selfishness, narrow-mindedness, conservatism and a wide assortment of "isms." But when we explain our own behavior to ourselves, we attribute it to the ***situations*** we are in. Thus we might say that our actions were the result of complex constraints, time pressures, lack of resources, low budgets, and so forth. These attribution errors are natural and perhaps unavoidable simply because we cannot fully know the situations others confront. But, in the process of fulfilling our leadership and

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* Vaclav Havel describes some of the agonies of the new democracy in Czechoslovakia as follows:

"A wide range of human tendencies...has suddenly been liberated, as it were, from its straitjacket and given free rein at last. The authoritarian regime imposed a certain order-if that is the right expression for it-on these vices...And thus we are witnesses to a bizarre state of affairs:society has freed itself, true, but in some ways it behaves worse than when it was in chains. Criminality has grown rapidly, and the familiar sewage that in times of historical reversal always wells up from the nether regions of the collective psyche has overflowed into the mass media, especially the gutter press. But there are other, more serious and dangerous, symptoms: hatred among nationalities, suspicion, racism, even signs of fascism; viscous demagogy,. intrigue, and deliberate lying; politicking, an unrestrained, unheeded struggle for purely particular interests, a hunger for power, unadulterated ambition, fanaticism of every imaginable kind; new and unprecedented varieties of robbery, the rise of different mafias; the general lack of tolerance, understanding, taste and moderation, reason, And of course, there is a new attraction to ideologies, as if Marxism had left behind it a great unsettling void that had to be filled at any cost.." "Paradise Lost " The New York Review of Books, April 9, 1992. 6 - 8

membership roles, we must temper this natural impulse with reason and patience and use our intellects to refine our feelings so that we can together get on with the difficult tasks at hand.

Third, most of us have grown up with a somewhat romantic view of what we commonly refer to as "the grass roots," namely those who give direct services to children; They are sometimes described as those who work "in the trenches." Such a view helps us resist the temptation to get carried away with the power and authority we carry in our various roles, and keeps us mindful that our central mission is a commitment to children. However, it is useful to remember that all of us work in "trenches" of various kinds, and all of us have our own "war stories" of the situations we confront in our work on a daily basis. It is not difficult to imagine, for example, that those among us who work at at the upper levels of the federal and state agencies related to our field have to are under fire as regularly as those who work directly with children; certainly we must address the serious inequalities in compensation for the former than for the latter. Nevertheless, for a viable organization we should take the view that all "trenches" make equally important contributions to the overall mission of the association.

Furthermore, keep in mind that the history of civilization is full of examples of the "grass roots" being

wrong* . Not long ago, the grass rooters believed deeply that the power of kings and queens was theirs by divine right, and that women were unfit to vote. I always find it sobering and frightening to remind myself that Adolph Hitler was **elected** to office - by the grass roots! The principle here is that progress is always made by a few: those few who see ahead, and who see differently. Those few are often strident and shrill in their advocacy, and we need them to be so! We need them on the board. Remember also, that **the soundness of an idea is not related to the number of people who subscribe to it!** Democracy is not primarily about majority rule; it is about protecting the right to hold and to advocate minority views! So our board meetings are tiresome, trying and tense. The deliberations are slow and inefficient; much time is taken going over and over the same problems, arguments, discussions and disagreements. And that's the way it has to be if we prize the diversity of our membership. So we must accept and indeed, embrace our differences, and learn to disagree and remain colleagues and friends. After all, if we were all alike, we would only need one of us!

In addition, it has been my impression during five years on the governing board, that board members from the "grass roots" with relatively little experience of regional and national participation frequently defer to others with wider

* At the national press conference announcing his withdrawal from candidacy for U. S. president on April 27 David Duke of Louisiana described himself as "the only grass roots candidate for the presidency."

experience in discussions; they are often reluctant to speak out. This creates what seems to me to be a potential paradox in that because they are present at the discussion table it is assumed that they will reflect, represent and champion the "grass roots" point of view, and therefore other participants are less compelled to do so. However, if they were not actually present, the other members would feel far more compelled to attempt to reflect and represent their views and preferences in discussions of relevant matters. In other words, because they are there, but hesitant to speak out, their views may get less of a hearing than they might otherwise! This potential paradox makes it essential that our deliberations are conducted in such a way that each and every participants' views are aired, respected and accorded importance.

Dewey said that leadership is not giving in to what people demand, but helping them to understand more fully what is in their own best interests. Finally, we have to learn to temper our passions with reason. The essence of democratic processes is **deliberation** - coming together to exchange our thoughts, ideas, judgments, to engage in consensus building, and to provide leadership. As we proceed to look at the structure of our organization and how members' interests, needs, and demands should be addressed, let us keep in mind that democracy is hard, inefficient, irksome, and slow - but it is the "least worst" way to ensure the good life for **all** we serve.

Our Mission

While we can only envision the future on the basis of what we now know, we can still identify the issues that have to be addressed. Our mission remains to upgrade the quality of programs and provisions for young children and to improve public understanding of what is required to do so. We have always been and continue to be deeply involved in this work.

The position we took in 1987 on developmentally appropriate practices has captured educators of young children, not only among preschool and primary educators within our own country, but other countries as well. This work is going to be re-visited in the light of the experience and understandings we have accrued since it was first issued. The work will be hard; we will argue and debate at length, all over again. And so we should! But it deserves our serious attention and as much reflection, representation and responsibility as we can muster.

The National Goals effort of the President's Commission on Education has stimulated many agencies, governments, school districts, and organizations to mobilize and commit more of their resources to early childhood education. Our very able staff, and many of our members continue to be involved in this effort, and have clearly influenced it for the better. My one big wish is that we could do something to get away from the language of "readiness." Most of us know the pitfalls of this vague and difficult concept. A major one is that it addresses education as preparation for the "next life" rather than as

the provision of appropriate and meaningful experiences in this one. It tends also, perhaps inadvertently, to put the burden of education on children who are seen to be "unready" for what lies in store for them, rather than on those responsible for being ready for them as they are. I would prefer instead, that the goal were couched in terms of the **quality of life** of each child; that we focus on the question "What does it feel like to be a child in this particular environment?" whatever cultural, linguistic, ethnic, socio-economic, geographic, educational, etc. environment that happens to be.

While on the subject of the terms we use, I wish also that in our pronouncements about curriculum, we would eschew the term *child centered* and instead talk about teaching and curriculum approaches that are ***child sensitive***. When we talk among ourselves, we know what we mean. But to outsiders, the term child centered often signifies a curriculum that is child indulgent, in which anything goes, and that offers relatively little that is intellectually challenging.

Similarly, we have a long and laudable tradition of talking about play as the child's natural way of learning. When we talk to each other, we know what we mean. It is easy to see how much children learn when we observe them at play. But it is just as natural for children to learn through investigation. It has been suggested that young children are natural-born anthropologists, seriously devoted to making sense of the physical and social-psychological environment

into which they are born. They spontaneously devote enormous energy to making sense of what goes on around them, what people mean by their words and actions, when they do and don't mean it, what you can do where and when, what the objects around them are used for, made of, come from, and so forth. Thus a child sensitive curriculum is one that capitalizes not only on children's irrepressible impulse to play, but also on their similarly spontaneous motivation to investigate.

While on the subject of terminology, I worry about the extent to which we use industrial and corporate metaphors in our discussion of education. Let us not talk about the "child care industry." The care and education of children is not an industry comprised of manufacturing plants and production lines! The frequent allusions to "delivery systems," "outcomes," "exit criteria" for kindergarten, and to standardized assessments and readiness tests betray a factory model of education: taking raw materials and subjecting them to standard processes in order to produce standard products that seems inappropriate for our work. In some cases - **but not all** - the proliferation of special programs resemble the recalls of our manufacturers.

Furthermore, children are not national resources or national investments to be converted into something else, as are oil or steel. Children are the direct object of our concerns in their own right, and not means to other ends. It seems inappropriate to me to justify expenditure of funds and resources on children on the basis of future national

competitiveness or capital. The reason to devote our energy, resources and concerns to young children is that it is **right** to do so. Perhaps it is a bit premature to characterize to our services as a profession; but we are well enough on our way to it to opt for that rather than the industrial, corporate or bureaucratic terms.

Another great effort that lies ahead of us is to continue our work on cultural diversity, multicultural approaches to teaching and the curriculum, and the complex issues in bilingual and multilingual education in the very early years. We will be discussing all these matters at length in the coming years, and we will surely disagree on many points. And so we should - by the very nature of the topics themselves. Whenever we talk about culture and cultural transmission we are talking about our deepest commitments to what is valuable, right and worthwhile. Nevertheless, it seems appropriate for each of us to keep in mind that we each belong to and participate in many cultures, and that none of them is monolithic or homogeneous. There are probably as many important differences in values and views within cultures as between them. Even our commitment to cultural diversity is itself a manifestation of a culture! Our shared commitment to democratic processes is itself a manifestation of culture long in the making. No cultures now or in the past remain fixed and static for long; they are always and always have been in flux, in cross cultural contact, and engaged in inter-cultural borrowing. Our daily news is full of reports of ancient and

new inter-cultural tensions and blends, and they are not likely ever to go away completely; most likely there are gains and losses for all of them over time.

It seems to me that the heart of the problems we must confront is not so much cultural differences or diversity, but cultural imperialism, oppression, suppression, ethnocentrism and racism (See Kozol, 1991). The challenge for us is not only to discard these inequalities, but to fashion a new American culture which builds on the rich and diverse contributions of all of us. I believe that we have much more in common than we have apart. This work will surely be hard and contentious, but well worth the effort.

I look forward also to our work in the Institute for Early Childhood Professional Development that is just now taking off. In my view without standards of professional practice below which no practitioner may be allowed to fall there is no profession. We have a huge task to develop standards of teaching practice and teacher education, and methods of assessing them. We will need to hear from all of you as we launch this challenging and essential effort.

Of all the issues deserving our attention that we can identify, which should we focus on? It is very unlikely that we can do everything equally well. This question reminds me of one of the generic dilemmas of teaching: coverage versus mastery. A dilemma is a situation in which one of two equally desirable courses of action must be selected, and when we select one we forsake the inherent advantages to gained if we

had selected the other. In teaching, if we opt for wide coverage, we sacrifice mastery; if we opt for mastery, we reduce coverage. There is no way to have the advantages of both courses of action at the same time! My vote is for mastery. We are always faced with the temptation to expand coverage, i.e. our scope and mission. But the quality of our efforts - of which we can all be justly proud - is more likely to be well served if we focus on a narrower set of the highest priority tasks, than if we spread ourselves too thinly. Keep in mind that the central assets of a profession and of professionals are their expertise and their integrity, and both are jeopardized by excessive work loads.

The Larger Context in which we Work

It seems to me that we are working in a context and climate that I often think of as "government by cliche." Perhaps this is an inevitable consequence of the modern media age. But it is nevertheless dangerous.

One of the cliches that gets a lot of attention is ***accountability***. This concept deserves scrutiny because it seems to me to be widely misunderstood. Teachers are not accountable for every child being above average! Whenever we apply a metric of any kind to any group of individuals, we will observe a distribution of differences: some will have more and some will have less of whatever is measured.** There is no way around this distribution effect. The absolute level

** See Kozol (1991) for an excellent discussion of this problem.

or amount of what is measured may shift, e. g. the average height of human beings over the last 300 years. But the fact that some will have more or less of the measured characteristic is inevitable.

But perhaps the easiest way to unpack this cliche is to think about physicians and their work. They are not accountable for everyone living forever, never getting old or suffering the inevitable decline that comes with age. But a physician is accountable for applying to each and every case all of the standard procedures known and shown to be appropriate to it with all the skill, attention and professional judgment she has. Thus as teachers, we are accountable for applying all the skill, knowledge, ingenuity, energy we have to each situation. Sometimes that will not be enough to off-set the difficulties of the children we serve. That is why the development of standards of professional practice is so important; so that we can say honestly, as teachers, family day caregivers, directors, instructors, national, state and local officials, that we have applied every method, approach, and strategy known (thus far) to foster the growth, development and learning of all those we serve. For that we are truly accountable.

I wish also, that we could get the opinion-makers and molders of our country to stop dumping on the schools. First, because it does not help schools. On the contrary, the glib way in which opinion-makers blame the schools for various national ills is demoralizing and discouraging to those who

are working so hard in often disheartening situations. Discouragement and demoralization is followed by less effort, which further discourages and demoralizes the practitioner.

Second, it is unlikely that our national difficulties are caused by the schools, even though we can all agree that they are not, and probably never will be, good enough. I was in Ypsilanti, Michigan on the day that General Motors announced the closing of its big Willow Run auto plant. That evening the news program showed videotapes of the huge new auto plant being built in Mexico where much of the work previously done in Michigan will be moved. Is that because Mexico has a better school system? On the contrary, most likely it is because manufacturers will be better able to exploit our brothers and sisters to the south by paying much lower wages and by exploiting much lower environmental protection standards that may damage their air and water.

A week or two before that announcement there was a report in the news of the results of a new comparative study of science and mathematics achievement of nine and thirteen year olds in some dozen countries. Notice that in both mathematics and science, Russian children were ahead of the U. S. sample. Is that what makes Russia such a great country for its suffering citizens!

So often in conferences and meetings educators are enjoined to "take a lesson from the business world." Which business? The Savings and Loans business? The businesses that

show low profits, near bancruptcy plus higher executive salaries? Furthermore, businesses fail every day!

Finally, I think a really appropriate national goal for our the U. S. A. would be to make our country a clear and shining example of a society which guarantees economic, social and civil justice for all of its citizens. That goal would be very difficult, but unquestionably worth the effort.

Finally, we have a truly great organization. We have a superb staff who are not only competent - over the years on the board I have repeatedly been dazzled by their competence and effectiveness on behalf of all of us. In addition, they are also deeply dedicated to the welfare of the organization and to its important mission. We have a lot to do, and a lot of talent. It has been said before (Smith, 1991) that "joint action can overcome powerlessness." Let's join together to empower ourselves to work for the best interests of all our children.

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